

[Narrator] You've tuned in to another edition of The Break Room, a

weekly conversation about how the City of Saint Augustine

works from those who do the work every day. Hosted by the

City of St. Augustine's communications director,

Melissa Wissel. The Break Room offers a closer look at the

different city departments and provides updates on current and

upcoming projects and events and now your host Melissa

Wissel. [Melissa] Welcome to The Breakroom and thanks for tuning

in. With state and local elections happening this year,

we've got Vicky Oakes back in the break room. Vicky is our

supervisor of elections for
Saint Johns County. She's got

lots of reminders and helpful
tips about voting in Saint

Johns County particularly with
lots of new residents and of

course, it's never enough to
keep our seasoned residents up

to speed. Vicky, welcome back.

[Vicky] Thank you. I always appreciate

you having me on, Melissa. [Melissa] It
it's funny because you and I

were walking over here and we
talk about things and you still

correct me because even I get
confused. I have notes. I still

get confused so I do love
having you on Cuz it's so

important to register and vote.

[Vicky] Yes. [Melissa] It is our constitutional

right. [Vicky] It is. [Melissa] I've I really
never really fully appreciated

it till I really got more adult
and really started paying

attention. Um you know there's
there's so much going on and we

really want to make sure that
all of our residents have their

voices heard. So let's start
with deadline to get

registered. Gotta register if
you want to vote. [Vicky] That's true.

And our first selection in 20
twenty-four. Happy New Year.

[Melissa] Yes. [Vicky] Is the upcoming March 19th
presidential preference

primary. The last day to
register to vote or change your

party affiliation is February
the twentieth. [Melissa] That's a

Tuesday. [Vicky] Yes. [Melissa] Okay. And again
we're going to just we're just

going to drill this into our
listener's head. This is as you

talked you just said it is a
presidential preference and We

only have the Republicans to be
voting for the presidential

preference. [Vicky] That's correct,
Melissa. [Melissa] Help help me. I mean,

you explain it very clearly.
Some people may think it's

obvious but I you explained it
very well to me. I didn't

really realize that it was only
for the Republicans if I'm

being honest. [Vicky] So, this is the
party's process of selecting

their nominees that will
receive the delegate votes at

the summer conventions. The
Democratic Party Florida only

put forth one candidate
President Joe Biden so

therefore there will not be a
Democratic ballot in the March

nineteenth election. The
Republican Party put forth

seven candidates. If you are a
registered Republican there

will be seven names on your
ballot even though some

candidates have already
suspended their campaigns.

There was a deadline to
withdraw which was back in

December and that deadline has

already passed. [Melissa] And there's a

Difference. [Vicky] There is a
difference between withdrawing

and suspending. So there's
seven names on the ballot.

Regardless of what happens in
the next few weeks you know

we've already had Iowa, New
Hampshire, next stop is Nevada,

South Carolina, Super Tuesday
with 15 states. The landscape

could change between now and
then. But whoever wins

Florida's primary on March the
19th will receive at the

Republican National Convention
in July in Milwaukee, all of

Florida's delegate votes. [Melissa] And
so that's that's the piece of

this election that's the
presidential preference. Let's

talk a little bit why this is
so important for our city

residents. Cuz a lot of folks
are registered voters in Saint

Johns County. But we do have a
unique situation in the city

limits. [Vicky] We do. The City
Commission put a charter

amendment on the ballot which
will be for all voters living

in the city of Saint Augustine
that are registered voters. So

regardless of your party
affiliation and whether or not

you'll have the Republican
presidential race on your

ballot as a resident you're
going to have a ballot and it's

going to have the Charter
Amendment on it. [Melissa] So if I'm a

city resident and I'm
registered anything other than

a Republican I should still go
to vote. [Vicky] You absolutely should.

And just remember Melissa prior
to every election my office

sends out a sample ballot and
we will continue to do so. So

about three weeks before the
March election, the residents

and eligible voters in this
city will be receiving their

sample ballot. So they'll be
able to see the actual wording

of the Charter Amendment. [Melissa] And I
think that's really important

too because for those who

figure I'm not a Republican.

I'm not voting. We as a city
want you to come out and vote

on the referendum. It has to do
with our charter so it's

something that it's our police
retirement system and our

police retirement fund they're
pulling some of that language

out of the charter putting it
into our municipal code makes

it a little bit easier for the
city to work with those

concerns with our police
department so it's like you

said it's a charter amendment
right so we do want our voters

to come out regardless of the
party [Vicky] yeah and it's a very

simple yes or no [Melissa] We want to
make it easier so but it's up

to the individual voter. Um I
want to bring up also you I

live in the city limits even
still being in Saint Johns

County. Your office sends out
those really nice newsletter

newspaper [Vicky] it's called the
Citizens Guide [Melissa] and it's also on

your website but the Citizens
Guide is really handy. You

want to talk a little bit about
all that information that's in

the Citizens Guide for our
residents. [Vicky] Yes. So, we publish

one specifically for the March
election. Melissa, it's the

most misunderstood election
because number one, it only

happens every four years and

our new residents that are

coming to Florida and Saint
Johns County from other states.

Their processes are different.

So, not only in electing their

their nominee for president but
also with regard to their

elections. So, I think it's
very important that our

residents and voters be
informed of our processes, not

only the coming March election
but our next August 20th

primary and the November
general election. I want people

informed. I want them ready to
vote. [Melissa] Yeah and we have people

running for reelection and

running new positions in the

county and that's going to be
what they're voting for in

August. [Vicky] Yes. And actually that
starts at the federal level. We

have US Senate up for
reelection. Congressmen and

women are up for election state
representative, our state

senator, and state
representatives. They're all up

for election as well as a
number of county offices and

city officials as well. [Melissa] If
you're just now tuning in to

the break room, you're
listening to Vicky Oakes. She

is our supervisor of elections.
I'm Melissa Wissel,

communications director for the city. We're talking about

voting in Saint Johns County.

It's so important. Um you were

just mentioning the things about we've got new residents

and it's so important to inform our residents. We've got let's

talk a little bit about early voting. [Vicky] Okay. [Melissa] Cuz early voting

is to me the early voting is sort of your no excuse. You

can't say oh I can't get there on election day because I'm out

of town. [Vicky] Right. [Melissa] So you can go vote early. That's why I love

it when you call us and I guess it's our other states but we're

a no excuse state. I like that.

[Vicky] Yeah so no excuse state has to

do with voting by mail. [Melissa] Okay.

[Vicky] So if you want to a ballot. You

just simply have to do so. Just

as a reminder to your

listeners, there were some law

changes since the last

election, all twenty-two, after

the 2- election, all vote by

mail ballot request expired.

So, due to that law change, if

you intend to vote by mail this

year, you have to make a new

request and you will have to do

it now for every election

cycle. So, no excuse is voting

by mail. You mentioned early

voting. I love it. I vote early

too, Melissa. [Melissa] Yeah. [Vicky] Because I'm

a little busy on election day

and I don't all [Melissa] You're right

there. You can't just pop right
in. I I would imagine at the

end of the day you go oh I
forgot to vote. [Vicky] Well my

precinct. I would. I would
probably have that problem.

Well my precinct is way out on
sixteen at the Act Center. So I

do go out and visit polling
places on election day. But I

love early voting. And my
favorite thing about early

voting is we open up locations
all over the county. We will

have six for this election.
They are open for two Saturdays

and one Sunday. Consecutive
days once we start early voting

and there's no wrong place to
go. You can pick a location and

vote at any location which is
most convenient for you. [Melissa] Well,

and I guess when I hear the no
excuse, I I know you're

mentioning that it's because of
the mail but to me, it also

just means there's really no
excuse for not voting because

whether it's the vote by mail,
go early or election day. There

are plenty of opportunities to
cast your ballot. [Vicky] There are. [Melissa] I

love it. [Vicky] There are. [Melissa] You really
don't have an excuse not to

vote. Uh so the locations, can
you go over some of those

locations and now this just to
remind folks, if you could also

mention the the city limits

specifically because again,

this is that special referendum

or the the charter vote is just

for the city limits but for the

Republican Party presidential

preference, could you go over

those locations in the city

limits? [Vicky] Yes. So, we have four

polling places in the city.

They are Fullerwood, the National

Guard Armory on San Marco

Avenue, the River House and the

Elks Lodge [Melissa] so those are your

places to go for early voting

[Vicky] those are election day precincts [Melissa] okay and

that is March 19th [Vicky] 19th, the

polls will be open from 7 to 7 a

couple of the precincts not all

of the voters that vote at

these locations live in the
city so you just have to Check

your sample ballot. [Melissa] And the
early voting is also for the

this presidential preference.

It's not only in the primary

election. [Vicky] That's correct and
we'll use our same six

locations which the two most
convenient for voters in the

city are my office at Avenue A
up by the Courthouse Complex

and then just across the bridge
is the city of Saint Augustine

Beach City Hall that's also one
of our locations. [Melissa] Is there

Anything else that you noticed
that you wanted to share with

our listeners? We you last time
you were here we talked about

the overhaul of the database
and the work that your office

is doing to really tighten up
the integrity. It's such a big

issue nationally. We really
we've had a great turnout in

elections. [Vicky] Saint Johns County's
pretty much known for our voter

turnout in the 2020 general
presidential election. Saint

Johns County had a 85% voter
turnout. We were third highest

in the state [Melissa] Uh that's a lot.
[Vicky] That's a lot. Now, in the

gubernatorial in the twenty
twenty-two, we had a 65% voter

turnout. Melissa, what's really
sad is if you look at our

turnouts in our August primary

election where your city

commissioners, local officials

might be elected, sadly, the

turnout is usually only between

25 and 28%. It is terrible.

[Melissa] Yeah. [Vicky] So, I want to voters to

educate themselves. We always

send you a sample ballot. We

notify you that your election

is coming. [Melissa] Well and you and I

talked about this. We're

going to do a little bit better

job here in the next couple of

weeks reminding our residents

specifically about that that

ballot item that regardless of

your party. Come out and vote.

You're a city resident. This is

something that affects you know

the the people that work for
you, our police department and

you you want to a vote. But
before we sign off, let's go

back a quick second here. Tell
me again what all you've been

doing in the in your office.

We're talking about what you've

been working on in terms of
that integrity of voting. [Vicky] Yes,

so our state legislator was
kind enough to update and give

us some really good solid list
maintenance laws this year that

took effect July 1st. So we
have been doing a lot of

mailings to our voters that
they have now given us new

tools that we can use to
increase the accuracy of our

voter rolls with our list
maintenance mailings and last

year we mailed over 30, 000
notices and have removed our

shall I say taken from the
active voter list moved them

over to the inactive voter list
about 20, 000 voters on our

rolls these were voters we sent
we that had not voted in the

last couple of elections we
hadn't heard from and we sent

them no A lot of them came back
undeliverable. [Melissa] Wow. [Vicky] So. [Melissa] That's

a good thing I guess. [Vicky] Yes. [Melissa] And
you can take them out. [Vicky] Well, [Melissa] or

what do you have to do with
that? [Vicky] Okay. So, what the law

requires is we mail them a

notice. If it comes back on

deliverable or if they do not

respond within 30 days, we move

them from the active list to

the inactive list. Back in

August, our voter rolls dropped

by about 15, 000 for those who

watch numbers daily on our

website. So those voters being

moved to the inactive list

begins them on the pathway for

being removed from voter rolls.

So if they still have two

elections they can vote they

can still vote twenty-four and

twenty-six. If we there's no

activity in the record by

twenty-six then they are

removed from Florida voter

rolls. But let's just say
Melissa that I mailed you one

of those notices and not that
you would but you ignored me

[Melissa] which I never ignore
your mail. [Vicky] I don't take it

personal. It's okay. But let's
just say you didn't respond to

that notice and you went off to
the inactive role. But now it's

election time and oh dear what
do you do? So what all you have

to do for us is to confirm that
you are still a resident of

Saint Johns County and confirm
your address for us then we can

reinstate your record and you
can vote in person or Request a

vote-by-mail ballot. [Melissa] And the
first thing that would happen

would be I would say to myself,
oh I think I threw out that

thing from the election's
office and I would say, hm

where do I go? Vote SJC. gov.
[Vicky] Right. [Melissa] And anything I need

there is going to be there if I
put in my information will show

me I'm inactive and I would
just update my information. [Vicky] It

will. It will. [Melissa] And then I'm not
inactive anymore. [Vicky] And then you

can go and vote or request a
vote by mail ballot. It's very

important that voters keep
their information up date with

the elections office. We're a
very mobile society. People

move all the time and
unfortunately, we seem to be on

the bottom of the food chain.

They don't think about updating

their addresses until it's time
to vote. [Melissa] Vote SJC. gov for all

of that. Check your voter
status. There's a there's a

link on the homepage of vote
SJC. gov that says my voter

status. Check that out. Update
your information. Make sure

you're registered to vote and
when that we're out of time.

Thanks for coming down. [Vicky] Thanks
for having me. [Melissa] If you missed

part of this broadcast and
want to go back and listen from

the beginning, we are on your

favorite podcasting app. Look

for us on Spotify, iHeartRadio,
Apple Podcast, and more. We

want to keep you informed. Stay
connected to the city and the

county. Follow the city on
Facebook X and Instagram at

City Saint Aug. Until next
time. Thanks for tuning in.

[Narrator] You've been listening to The
Breakroom, a weekly program

addressing projects and
programs offered by City of

Saint Augustine. Join us each
week as the city's

communications director,
Melissa Wissel, has in-depth
conversations with the people
who make our town work to meet

the needs of our community. See
you at this time next week for

another edition of The
Breakroom.